

EXTRACT FROM AN
ADDRESS
IN THE
VIRGINIA GAZETTE,
OF MARCH 19, 1767.

By a respectable Member of the Community.

MR. RIND,

PERMIT me, in your Paper, to address the Members of our Assembly, on two points, in which the Public interest is very nearly concerned.

The abolition of slavery and retrieval of specie in this colony, are the subjects on which I would bespeak their attention.—

Long and serious reflections upon the nature and consequences of slavery have convinced me, that it is a violation both of justice and religion; that it is dangerous to the safety of the community in which it prevails; that it is destructive to the growth of arts and sciences; and lastly, that it produces a numerous and very fatal train of vices, both in the slave, and in his master.

To prove these assertions, shall be the purpose of the following essay.

That slavery then is a violation of justice, will plainly appear, when we consider what justice is. It is simply and truly defined, as by *Justinian*, *Constans et perpetua voluntas, jus suum cuique tribuendi*; a constant endeavour to give every man his right.

Now, as freedom is unquestionably the birth-right of all mankind, *Africans* as well as *Europeans*, to keep the former in a state of slavery, is a constant violation of that right, and therefore of justice.

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The ground on which the civilians who favour slavery, admit it to be just; namely, consent, force and birth, is totally disputable. For surely a man's own will and consent, cannot be allowed to introduce so important an innovation into society as slavery, or to make himself an outlaw, which is really the state of a slave, since neither consenting to, nor aiding the laws of the society, in which he lives, he is neither bound to obey them, nor entitled to their protection.

To found any right in force, is to frustrate all right, and involve every thing in confusion, violence and rapine. With these two the last must fall, since if the parent cannot justly be made a slave, neither can the child be born in slavery. "The law of nations, says Baron *Montesquieu*, has doomed prisoners to slavery, to prevent their being slain; the *Roman* civil law, permitted debtors whom their creditors might treat ill, to sell themselves. And the law requires that children, whom their parents being slaves cannot maintain, should be slaves like them. These reasons of the civilians are not just, it is not true that a captive may be slain, unless in a case of absolute necessity; but if he hath been reduced to slavery, it is plain that no such necessity existed, since he was not slain. It is not true that a free man can sell himself, for sale supposes a price, but a slave and his property becomes immediately that of his master, the slave can therefore receive no price, nor the master pay, &c. And if a man cannot sell himself, nor a prisoner of war be reduced to slavery, much less can his child." Such are the sentiments of this illustrious civilian; his reasonings, which I have been obliged to contract, the Reader, interested in this subject, will do well to consult at large.

Yet even these rights of imposing slavery, refutable as they are, we have not to authorize the bondage of the *Africans*. For neither do they consent to be our slaves, nor do we purchase them of their conquerors. The *British* merchants obtain them from *Africa* by violence, artifice and treachery, with a few trinkets to prompt those unfortunate ***** people to enslave one another by force or stratagem. Purchase them indeed they may,

may, under the authority of an act of the British parliament. An act entailing upon the *Africans*, with whom we were not at war, and over whom a British parliament could not of right assume even a shadow of authority, the dreadful curse of perpetual slavery, upon them and their children for ever. *There cannot be in nature, there is not in all history, an instance in which every right of men is more flagrantly violated.* The laws of the ancients never authorized the making slaves, but of those nations whom they had conquered; yet they were Heathens and we are Christians. They were misled by a monstrous religion, divested of humanity, by a horrible and barbarous worship; we are directed by the unerring precepts of the revealed religion we possess, enlightened by its wisdom, and humanized by its benevolence; before them were gods deformed with passions, and horrible for every cruelty and vice; before us is that incomparable pattern of meekness, charity, love and justice to mankind, which so transcendently distinguished the Founder of Christianity and his ever amiable doctrines.

Reader, remember that the corner stone of your religion is to do unto others as you would they should do unto you; ask then your own heart whether it would not abhor any one, as the most outrageous violator of that and every other principle of right, justice and humanity, who should make a slave of you and your posterity for ever. Remember that God knoweth the heart, lay not this flattering unctioꝛ to your soul, that it is the custom of the country; that you found it so; that not your will but your necessity consents. Ah! think how little such an excuse will avail you in that awful day, when your Saviour shall pronounce judgment on you, for breaking a law too plain to be misunderstood, too sacred to be violated. If we say that we are Christians, yet act more inhumanly and unjustly than Heathens, with what dreadful justice must this sentence of our blessed Saviour fall upon us: “Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (*Matthew* vii. 21.) Think a moment how much your temporal,
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your eternal welfare depends upon an abolition of a practice, which deforms the image of your God, tramples on his revealed will, infringes the most sacred rights, and violates humanity.

Enough I hope has been asserted to prove that slavery is a violation of justice and religion. That it is dangerous to the safety of the state in which it prevails, may be as safely asserted.

What one's own experience has not taught, that of others must decide. From hence does history derive its utility; for being, when truly written, a faithful record of the transactions of mankind, and the consequences that flowed from them, we are thence furnished with the means of judging what will be the probable effect of transactions similar among ourselves.

We learn then from history, that slavery, wherever encouraged, has sooner or later been productive of very dangerous commotions. I will not trouble my reader here with quotations in support of this assertion, but content myself with referring those who may be dubious of its truth, to the histories of *Athens*, *Lacedemon*, *Rome*, and *Spain*.——

How long, how bloody and destructive was the contest between the Moorish slaves, and the native Spaniards? and after almost deluges of blood had been shed the Spaniards obtained nothing more, than driving them into the mountains.———Less bloody indeed, tho' not less alarming have been the insurrections in Jamaica; and to imagine that we shall be forever exempted from this calamity, which experience teaches us to be inseparable from slavery, so encouraged, is an infatuation as astonishing as it will be surely fatal.———&c. &c.